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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet, published by the Canadian Department of Manpower and Immigration, is the second of a Careers-Canada series and describes careers in clerical occupations. The pamphlet is divided into nine major parts: (1) history and importance; (2) fields of employment; (3) nature of the work (this is subdivided into the secretarial group, the public contact group, records and processing group, the accounting group, the accounting machine group, the office appliance group, the material control group, and general office clerks); (4) working conditions; (5) advancement; (6) personal qualities needed on the job; (7) preparation and training; (8) future outlook; and (9) seeking employment. Several photographs are included. (RWP)

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2 - CLERICAL OCCUPATIONS

CAREERS CANADA

Manpower and Immigration

Main-d'œuvre et Immigration

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

All Canadians must be given the opportunity to determine their abilities, develop them through education and training, and apply their talents in a meaningful occupation. To achieve this goal, sound information must be made available to every Canadian at a stage in their development where fruitful decisions can be made. Careers – Canada is a major effort towards this end.

The benefits of the Careers – Canada series should affect many people: the student considering entrance into the world of work; the worker seeking to change occupations; the prospective immigrant; the manpower or vocational guidance counsellor, in fact, anyone wishing to match people with jobs.

Many people have been involved in the production of Careers – Canada, I join them in wishing you every success in your career search.

Robert Andras

NOTE TO READERS

The ultimate judge of any material is the user. It is recognized that improvements can be made in the initial booklets and we ask all readers to forward any suggestions to us. The consolidation of these comments will allow us to better provide you with the type of information required.

Suggestions and comments should be addressed to:

Director,
Occupational and Career Analysis
and Development Branch,
Department of Manpower and Immigration,
305 Rideau Street,
OTTAWA, Ontario.
K1A 0J9

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HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE

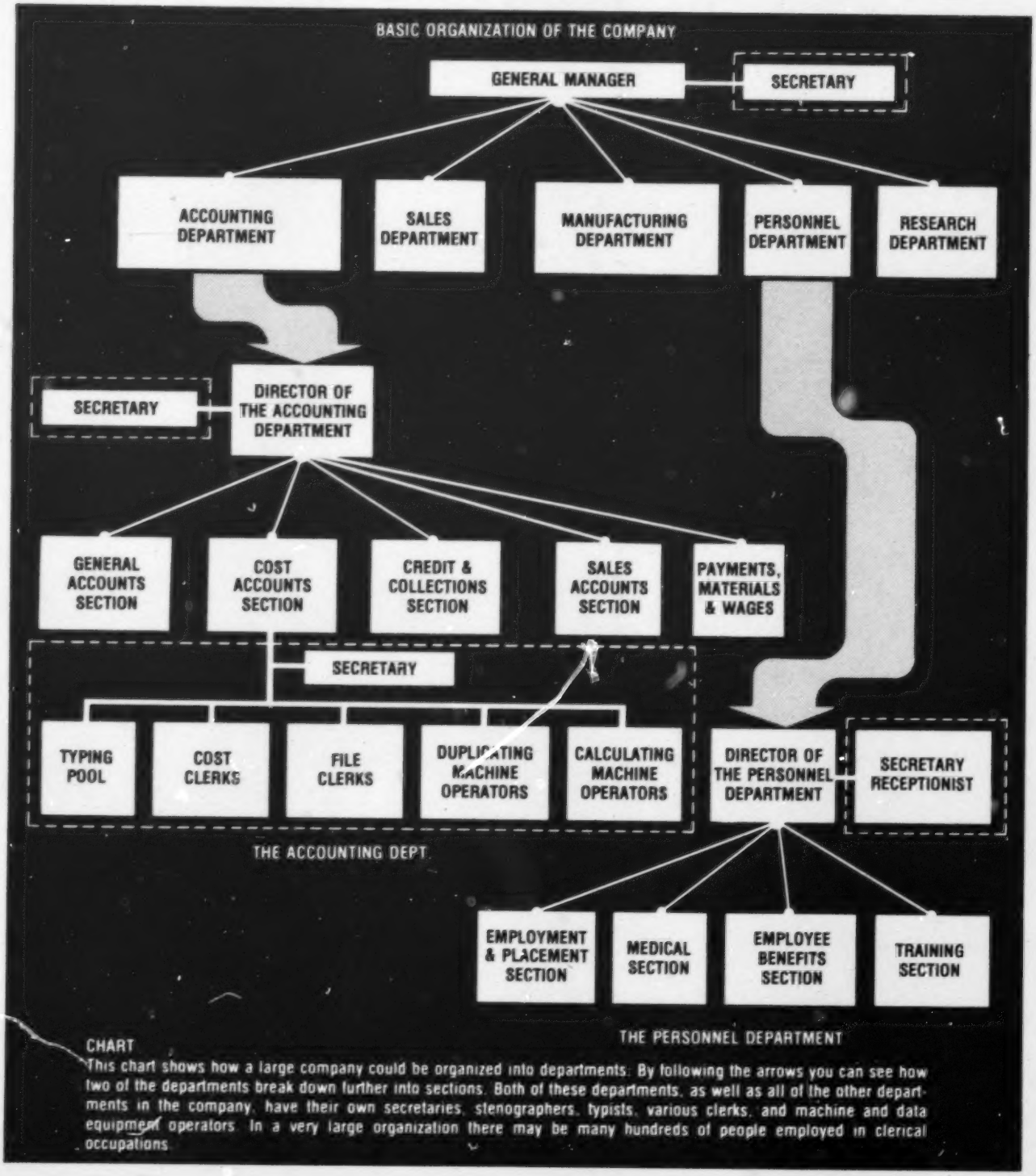
Clerical workers, as we know them today, really became a necessity when modern trade and commerce began to flourish in Canada. The resulting information explosion made it increasingly important to record all transactions, agreements and general business dealings.

Written communication is really what clerical work is all about – recording information and getting ideas across to other people. Although it was not too difficult to keep track of how many beaver pelts you needed to trade for a good hunting knife, the amount of paperwork required to keep track of all the interests of a modern multi-million dollar business is staggering!

Today, more than 15 out of every 100 people working in Canada are in clerical occupations. However, there is a striking contrast between the clerks of today and those working just after the turn of the century. Now, clerks have the benefit of mechanical and electronic office equipment, sometimes linked to computer facilities to further speed up data processing. This makes it possible for them to process quantities of information never dreamed of by earlier clerical workers, who used steel-nibbed pens and worked out numerical computations by hand.

In the pages which follow we will describe many of the clerical occupations. By the time you have finished reading them you should have a clearer idea of whether or not this is a type of work you would like.

FIELDS OF EMPLOYMENT



CHART

This chart shows how a large company could be organized into departments. By following the arrows you can see how two of the departments break down further into sections. Both of these departments, as well as all of the other departments in the company, have their own secretaries, stenographers, typists, various clerks, and machine and data equipment operators. In a very large organization there may be many hundreds of people employed in clerical occupations.

FIELDS OF EMPLOYMENT

People in clerical positions work in almost every Canadian community from the smallest village to the largest city. However, there are far more clerical positions in those towns and cities where main offices of large industrial, commercial and government organizations are located.

The actual work done by people in clerical positions will generally vary depending on the size and type of organization. A clerical worker in a small company with very few office people, for example, will normally have a number of different things to do each day. The same applies for people who work in the offices of lawyers, doctors, insurance agents, or any others who run their own business. In these offices, clerical people may act as secretary/stenographers, bookkeeping clerks, and receptionists, all at the same time. These small establishments are usually only equipped with typewriters, adding and calculating machines, and copiers.

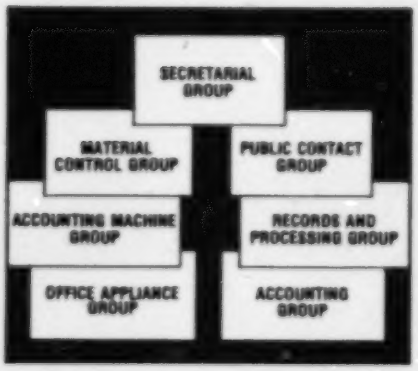
The situation is quite different in larger organizations such as main offices of insurance companies, banks or large manufacturing firms. Here you will find many clerical people, and each person will have a very specific job to do. As well, some people in these organizations will be working with very advanced and complex types of office machines, electronic equipment and computers, which are designed to handle enormous quantities of printed information extremely quickly.

In order to get a better idea of where clerical people may be employed, it will help to have a look at how large businesses are organized.

NATURE OF WORK

There are numerous occupations in the clerical field. The type of work involved in each varies considerably, but some are more closely related than others. For this reason the clerical occupations have been divided into several groups. Some of these occupations involve working with people; others, with machines – including computers. Some demand patience and a knack for doing detail work meticulously. Others require a warm smile and a friendly, efficient manner. You will probably find that occupations in one of the groups seem more suited to you than those in other groups. Be careful, however, not to let the group divisions mislead you. In reality, some occupations are made up of duties from more than one group.

Below is a diagram showing the groups we will look at:



SECRETARIAL GROUP

If you were employed in any of the occupations described in this group, you would primarily be typing and preparing all kinds of written material. We will look at the duties of secretaries, stenographers, dictating machine operators, and typists.

Secretaries

Secretaries prepare all types of correspondence and help out with routine office duties. In performing their work they often see and handle information which is confidential, so the person they work for must be able to trust them to keep it to themselves.

Imagine that you are a secretary. It is Monday morning and you have just walked into the office, said hello to everyone, and sat down at your desk. Right away you would open and read all the mail that has arrived. If you have all the necessary facts to answer any of the letters, you might prepare and type replies for your employer's signature. However, you can see that much of the mail has to go directly to the person you work for. Before passing it on though, you check to see if you have any other letters or information on the same subject in your files. If so, and if you think it will save your employers some unnecessary searching, you will pass this material on as well. Any letters or messages which have to be sent out will be dictated to you, and you will type them up. After the person you are working for has signed them you will look after the mailing.

Most secretaries are quite busy answering or placing telephone calls. Some calls will be passed to your employer while you handle others. In addition you may make

appointments, arrange meetings, greet visitors, and supervise other clerical people in your office. If the person you are working for has to go on a business trip you will probably be asked to make all necessary travel arrangements. During such absences you will have to keep the office running smoothly.

Some secretaries specialize in a particular field of work. They may, for example, be legal, medical or social secretaries. As such they do the same type of work as other secretaries but they must also have a specialized knowledge of the field in which they are working. A secretary who works for a lawyer, for example, would have to know about many kinds of legal forms and special expressions used by lawyers. Medical secretaries would need to be familiar with medical terms and know medical insurance plans so that they could explain them to the doctor's patients.

Stenographers

As a stenographer you must be able to take shorthand notes and type them into letters and reports that are both pleasing to the eye and easy to read.

The larger the office staff the more specialized your work will be. In a large office you will probably work with a group of stenos who will be "on call" for several people. In a smaller office you may be called upon to do additional office duties such as those of a receptionist or switchboard operator.

As a stenographer your day may have some variety. The head of finance may ask you to take a letter dealing with the cost of a product. Later in the day the executive assistant to the personnel director might call you into the office to take down information for use in a speech. As your day progresses you will continue to take down information, type it into a pleasant format and return it to the person who dictated it. Accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation as well as speed and neatness are the most important aspects of your job.

You may want to concentrate in one of many areas. The medical, legal and engineering fields, for example, need people with typing and shorthand skills to record spoken ideas and translate them into written information. All stenographers need some knowledge of their employer's work so that they will be able to understand what is being dictated to them. This type of knowledge is often acquired on the job, but in some areas public educational institutions as well as private business colleges provide this type of training.

Another type of work in which you could be involved as a stenographer is court reporting. Court reporters, or verbatim reporters, take down and later type the words of everyone who speaks at a conference or in a court room. Because the speakers in this type of setting – perhaps a witness being cross-examined – could not be expected to repeat a statement for the benefit of the stenographer, court reporters have to be very skilled or they may miss an important word or phrase. Many court reporters use a machine called a "stenomask" to record what is said in a court room. This machine looks like an oxygen mask. As people in the court room speak, the stenographer merely repeats all of the words into the mask and, later types up the recorded dialogue. Thus, for this occupation, shorthand skills are not required. However, good hearing is essential to do this type of work properly.

NATURE OF WORK

Typists

Typists make typewritten copies of all kinds of information. The material they are typing from may be handwritten notes, rough first attempts at a written project, typed material which has many handwritten corrections, or dictaphone tapes. If you become a typist you will have to know your grammar well and be able to recognize any mistakes in the material you have been given. You will probably also spend part of your time, completing reports, and preparing master copies so that your work can be reproduced in volume on a duplicating machine.

A dictating machine is something like a tape recorder. Instead of writing out letters or other paperwork, the person you are working for may speak into a microphone. If you were operating a dictating machine, you would get the recording of the voice on magnetic tape, put the cassette in a dictating machine on your desk, and listen to it. As you hear the voice you would type what is said. This is called transcribing. It is more difficult than typing from written material because you often have to put in punctuation that may not have been indicated on the recorded dictation.

There are many kinds of automatic typewriters which you may have an opportunity to use as your career progresses. These machines can automatically add to, remove, or change information that has previously been typed into their "memory" units. This "memory" can be a magnetic card, disc, or tape. Information is stored on the "memory" of these machines by means of a normal typewriter keyboard. These automatic typewriters have extra keys to operate the equipment that make up their "memories", and they are used for producing everything from reports and publications to letters.

Telex machines are like typewriters, but they are connected electronically to other telex machines in different locations – maybe across Canada or even around the world. As an operator of a telex machine you would type on one machine and your work would automatically be typed out on another or several other machines. To operate the machine properly requires some training in special codes.

Success in operating any of this sophisticated electronic typewriter equipment depends on your having imagination, a good memory for codes and some interest in machinery.

THE PUBLIC CONTACT GROUP

Anyone who enjoys meeting and helping others will probably be quite interested in occupations in this group. These people represent their company or organization to all those who are not a part of it. We will be looking at the duties of receptionists, order clerks, telephone switchboard operators, tellers and cashiers.

Receptionists

As offices grew in size and complexity, and as everyone became more involved in individual tasks, it was necessary for a person to be specially appointed to meet and assist anyone coming into the office. This new position was called "receptionist". As a receptionist, you would be the first employee that visitors would see. Therefore, their first impression of your organization, which is often crucial, would depend on the way in which you greeted them. You would tactfully find out from visitors what they want or who they wish to see, and then direct them to the right person or department. Your efforts as a receptionist will greatly reduce unnecessary interruptions for other busy people in your organization.

Receptionists work in such different places as beauty salons, factories, hospitals and offices. Many of these organizations want their receptionists to keep records of all visitors, including time, date, person spoken to and nature of the business. However, as a receptionist you are seldom busy receiving and helping callers all of the time, so you usually have other duties which can be quickly put aside when necessary. These might be typing correspondence, or filing. In some establishments receptionists may also operate telephone switchboards and handle incoming mail. Neat appearance, courtesy and a friendly but firm approach are important qualities of a good receptionist.

NATURE OF WORK

Order Clerks

When a person wishes to order merchandise from your company, either by mail, telephone or in person, as an order clerk you would look after it. Imagine you are an order clerk and you have just received an order by mail for several machine parts your company distributes. You would fill out a detailed order form listing each item with its code number, price, and requested method of delivery. You may also have to check with your company's credit department to make sure the customer has a good record of paying debts. You would be responsible for any cash or cheques you receive with orders, and you normally would turn it in to the cashier at the end of each day.

As an order clerk you will often encounter rush periods, when many people are placing orders, enquiring about delivery, or making complaints. Even when you are busy you still have to do all of the paperwork involved in processing orders properly, and pleasantly look after all types of customers – including people in a real hurry, people who cannot make up their minds, and those who may not be friendly.

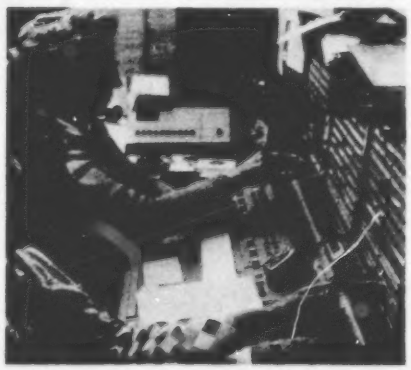
Telephone Switchboard Operators

Our society depends on the telephone as an essential way of communicating. There are two types of telephone operators – those employed in business organizations and those in telephone companies. We will discuss operators who work in business first, and then those who work for telephone companies.

Organization officials are well aware that much of their business will be done over the phone – and they know that the "voice" which represents their organization to the public may make a very strong impression. You can imagine, then, that switchboard operators are chosen carefully. Many operators work in commercial or manufacturing firms, or other organizations such as hotels or hospitals. They relay incoming, outgoing, and interoffice calls through a telephone switchboard, and may supply callers with information or take messages. They may also record details of long distance calls and check charges made on telephone bills before they are sent to the accounting department to be paid.

Automation has eliminated much of the tedious and boring work done by operators, and they are now often expected to do some typing or other routine work during slack periods on the switchboard. If the board is not a busy one, it may be set up in the front office, where the operator may also double as a receptionist.

Today, a large number of operators are employed with the eight major telephone companies across Canada. These people work in a variety of jobs which include information, directory assistance, and placing long distance calls. All these jobs involve helping people to speak with other people by telephone – across the street, across the country, or around the world.



Tellers

If you like handling money and dealing with the public, a career as a teller may be satisfying to you.

As a teller you would normally work in a bank or trust company. Because people usually place most of their money either for safe keeping or to earn interest in a bank, confidence in the bank is essential. If bank customers feel their money is being mishandled, or that records of their transactions are not being kept up-to-date, they will probably take their money to another bank.

Now, what would you do as a teller? Records of all bank transactions must be kept. When a customer presents cash, or cheques for deposit to an account, you will have to find the ledger card containing a record of that customer's account, and enter the deposit information on the account card. As well, the customer may request a receipt for the deposit. You would use the customer's account book to provide this or some special form your bank may have.

If a customer wishes to cash a cheque you would be responsible for making certain that the cheque is authentic and that the customer's signature is proper. Normally, you would ask your bank manager to authorize any large cheque. Again, you would make a record of the transaction.

Because you would be giving out cash in many of your transactions with the public, another of your duties would be to order money for this purpose. Again, keeping records would be your responsibility.

Throughout the day you would handle many transactions of the nature described here. By the end of the day, if you have been careful and accurate, all the money taken out of and put into accounts should balance.

Clearly, this job requires a great deal of record keeping. However, the main thing in all of your day's work would be to treat the public with respect and to answer their enquiries or requests for service quickly and knowledgeably. If you do not enjoy meeting the public, then a job where you would handle money away from the public might interest you more (See Accounts Group).

Cashiers

Cashiers handle money. In that way, their job is similar to a teller's. However, they normally do not have to cash cheques or handle deposits. Usually they work in commercial enterprises like stores and restaurants and receive money from customers who are paying for goods or services they have purchased.

Cashiers normally have a cash register that mechanically or electronically, produces a receipt for the customer. As a cashier your job then, is to accept money, calculate tax, and give receipts and change to the customer. You may also be responsible for handling credit card transactions.

Often, it will be necessary for you as a cashier to know the prices of goods or services in your establishment. In a cafeteria, for example, you would have to know the price of the various foods available so that you could add up the prices of the items on your cash register. Similarly, in a grocery store you would often be expected to know the prices of goods.

Cashiers are very important to a store's image. It is their responsibility to be agreeable and treat customers well. Thus, just being able to add up bills on the cash register and to make change is not enough. To be a good cashier you would also have to be pleasant.

NATURE OF WORK

THE RECORDS AND PROCESSING GROUP

People in this group are involved with classifying and filing publications, correspondence, and other related information – as well as preparing written requests to obtain or provide information – and maintaining records. We will look at the duties of correspondence clerks, personnel clerks, mail clerks, file clerks, and insurance, bank and other finance clerks.

Correspondence Clerks

Do you think you would enjoy answering routine enquiries on such things as customer credit, insurance plans, unsatisfactory service and so on? Then you may find a satisfactory future in this area.

As a correspondence clerk you would usually be working in a large organization where a great deal of mail comes in regularly. You would answer the routine enquiries. Sometimes you might reverse the process by writing to people for more information about their complaint, claim for insurance or whatever.

Suppose you work for an insurance company. Each day you would receive a great deal of mail. Some of it would deal with subjects ranging from requests for information to demands for a refund. Your job as a correspondence clerk would be to read the letters, decide where to get the information for replies to them, and then to write the replies. Some employers require their correspondence clerks to type their own letters – others have staff to do all of the typing for the office.

You would probably be able to answer some letters by obtaining information from company files. In other cases you might have to go to the department that has the details related to the writer's specific case. Often, however, you'll be able to answer some routine letters by sending a company form as a reply.

Personnel Clerks

As a personnel clerk you would collect and keep up-to-date information related to hiring, paying, and discharging employees of your firm.

People applying for positions in your organization will be referred to the personnel office. Normally, as a personnel clerk, you would give them an application form to complete. If the applicant's qualifications seem to fit your organization's need, you would probably refer the person to a higher authority for an interview.

Once applicants have been accepted, you would again interview them and complete all necessary documentation relating to medical and pension schemes and taxation. During the interview you would probably tell them about any rules the company has and try and make them feel as comfortable as possible.

It would also be your duty to keep track of people's attendance and to make sure that they are being paid on time and in the correct amount. You would have to deduct pension and other contributions from their pay and ensure that all deductions are recorded carefully.

Should anyone leave your organization you would be responsible for giving them all the forms required

so that they would have a record of benefits to which they are entitled as a result of their employment.

Your job would be to make sure that employee records are kept up-to-date and complete. Records of anything to do with people working for your firm that may affect their position, including performance ratings, would be your responsibility.

Mail Clerks

In most offices, a large quantity of letters and parcels is received and sent daily. Handling them is the responsibility of a mail clerk.

In this occupation you would have to route incoming mail to the correct person or department. As well, outgoing mail would have to be weighed and stamped with the proper postage. Sometimes it would be your responsibility to address letters or parcels.

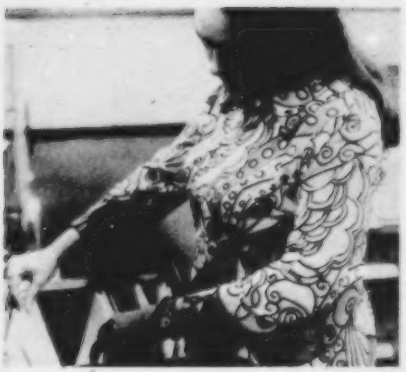
In performing these duties you may operate equipment such as letter openers, postage meters, and envelope sealing machines. You would probably also be responsible for picking up and delivering mail within your office. In big offices, a large volume of mail may involve moving heavy mail bags.

File Clerks

As a file clerk you would place letters, forms and other types of information in files so that they are quickly and easily available. You may also be responsible for finding files and keeping a record of them when they are going to be taken out of their normal storage place.

Your responsibilities could also include placing letters, invoices, bills, receipts, photographs, and all sorts of other information in files. As well you would spend much of your time withdrawing files from their normal storage place or looking for ones that may have been misplaced.

Because of space and financial considerations, much information is now being stored on microfilm. As a file clerk you may also be responsible for filming information – using easy to operate equipment – and for filing and indexing it in this form.



NATURE OF WORK

Insurance, Bank, and Other Finance Clerks

People in these occupations are concerned with banking, finance, insurance, and real estate. If you work in this field you would be responsible for reviewing insurance applications and making calculations of the premiums payable. You might also make changes to insurance policies at the request of the insured person and you would be responsible for keeping records of premiums paid as well as issuing receipts.

In a bank, you would often be concerned with processing applications for loans and mortgages, checking ledgers, renting safety deposit boxes, and recording security deposits.

Sometimes you would be responsible for compiling information on real estate. In this type of position you would research information related to the rents for apartments in a building that a customer wants to buy, or you might be responsible for getting information on the prices of buildings similar to the one your customer wants. All of this information would be used by the loan manager in your bank to help make a decision for, or against, lending a customer money.

Although the work is fairly routine you would be expected to use your initiative whenever an unusual situation developed. When customers in a bank want to cash bonds or security certificates, or some other form of non-cash, non-cheque security, you would serve them. Similarly, in an insurance office an insurance clerk might handle much of an agent's duties while he/she is away from the office.

THE ACCOUNTING GROUP

People who work in this group record and analyse all kinds of information related to the control of the money received and spent by their organization. There are many occupations in the accounting field. We will discuss bookkeepers, statistical clerks, payroll clerks, cost clerks, and posting clerks to give you an idea of what accounting people do.

Bookkeepers

Bookkeepers are responsible for maintaining accurate records of all financial transactions – how much and where the money comes from, and where and how it is being spent. This will involve preparing balance sheets, profit and loss statements, and other measures of the company's financial position. These not only indicate how much money is available to spend, but also give a clear indication of whether the company is making a profit. They might also reveal that some change in the company's operations could lead to increased efficiency. Often, especially in large organizations, bookkeepers use computers to help them record, calculate and analyze their company's financial information.

In large organizations, the workload is often divided among several bookkeepers ,each one responsible for a specific area of work. These people would all work directly under the head bookkeeper or accountant.

In addition to the duties we have already considered, the bookkeeper in a small organization might calculate wages and pay employees. Typing invoices and sending out monthly statements to customers may also be the bookkeeper's responsibility. Because bookkeepers are usually considered very responsible members of the company, they are often placed in charge of the office staff.

With experience, and completion of a rigorous program of studies, a bookkeeper can qualify as a Certified General Accountant (CGA), or a Registered Industrial Accountant (RIA).

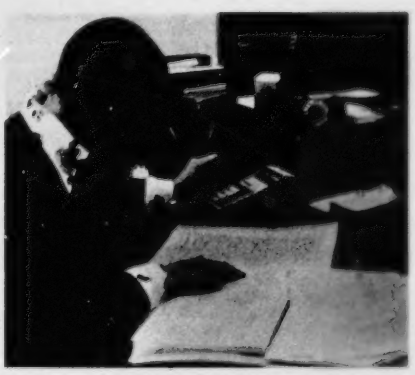
Statistical Clerks

Before the management of any organization can make important decisions, they must have at their finger tips accurate facts and figures about their organization. Statistical clerks collect this necessary information, study it, and then present it in reports at regular intervals, or in special statistical reports. These reports may be on a variety of subjects like sales, production, budgets, advertising, bad debts, or any other information that people who have to make major decisions in the organization need.

Statistical clerks get much of their information from bookkeeping records, but in order to collect other data they often require some knowledge of the basic operations of the organization. Percentages, index numbers, and graphs are the most frequently used methods of presenting information on trends, and statistical clerks usually figure these out using calculating machines. All types of research technicians and scientists also require statistical information. Clerks in research oriented work gather statistical information on subjects of interest to these people. As with management oriented statistical work a research clerk collects information and prepares it for reports in the form of graphs, tables, and charts, so that facts are presented clearly and can be easily used.

With the increasing use of computers for both management and research statistics, an understanding of computer applications is becoming increasingly important for statistical clerks. As well, some understanding of the scientist's or technician's goals is very important in many of these positions.

People trying to get a job as a statistical clerk should have completed high school, with fairly good marks in mathematics. Some companies that use a great deal of statistical data, look for people with specialized university or community college training in statistical analysis.



NATURE OF WORK

Payroll Clerks

As a payroll clerk you would calculate the amount each person in your organization earned during a given period, using information from attendance sheets, time cards, and production tickets. Then you would enter this amount on payroll forms, showing the worker's name, total earnings, all deductions – such as taxes, pension, and so on – and the amount left after deductions.

Payroll clerks are usually skilled in the use of calculating machines, and they also frequently write cheques and distribute pay envelopes. They must be extremely accurate – no one likes to be "short-changed" in pay. Many employers use computers to do much of the actual cheque production and pay calculations. If this is the case, it is left to the payroll clerk to input the correct information regarding hours worked and benefits payable. The computer does the rest automatically.

If you are interested in being a payroll clerk you should count on completing at least two years of high school. Normally, you would pick up six months or more of experience in a junior position in the accounts department before you would be considered capable of handling the responsibility of payroll work.

Cost Clerks

As you know, the purpose of business is to make a profit by selling something for more than it cost. In order to set a price which will give you a profit, you have to know just exactly what the things you are selling cost. In large manufacturing organizations, the total cost price consists of many separate items such as materials, wages, machines, tools, packaging and general handling – as well as building costs and many other expenses.

If you were a cost clerk, you would come up with figures on all these separate expenses by searching for and writing down information from time and producton sheets, payrolls, and bills from material and equipment suppliers. Sometimes, much of the information you require would be recorded in a computer. In this case you simply use the computer's information to help with your calculations. In other organizations the computer does the whole calculation of the cost of an item. To do this it uses information "input" to it from the various departments and suppliers of the firm.

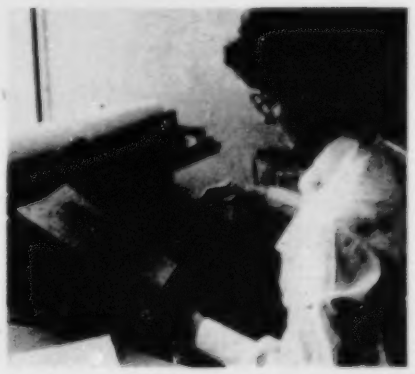
To be a cost clerk your marks in mathematics, accounting and technical subjects generally should be quite good. Before you actually get into this job you will usually have to spend at least a year training-on-the-job.

Posting Clerks

If you were a posting clerk you would record a variety of routine pieces of numerical information – called posting entries – in ledger columns or on special forms. Totaling these columns of figures at regular intervals – usually daily – using adding machines or calculators would be one of your duties, and normally, so would typing the headings on ledger sheets or special accounting forms.

All of the people working in an accounting office work as a team, counting on the others to do their share properly and accurately. If you were a posting clerk you would have to be very careful not to make mistakes, because if you did you would create a lot of extra work for other people in the office. As a matter of fact, computers, which are more accurate than people, are increasingly being used to perform some of the duties of posting clerks.

If you think you might like to work as a posting clerk, you should complete at least two years of high school. Another year would give you an edge, especially if you studied some business or commercial subjects. You should also have some basic typing ability.



THE ACCOUNTING MACHINE GROUP

People working in this group of occupations operate machines that do calculations automatically. In this section we will be talking about bookkeeping machine operators, billing machine operators, calculating machine operators, key punch operators, and verifier operators. There are other business machines, but a glimpse at these will give you some idea of what is involved in this type of work.

Bookkeeping Machine Operators

Like a typewriter, a bookkeeping machine has a keyboard and a roller where paper or cardboard forms can be inserted. It differs from a typewriter in that as well as a standard typewriter keyboard it has a keyboard for computations. The machine can add, subtract, multiply, divide, and automatically calculate the effect of any financial transaction.

As the operator of one of these machines in a bank, your job would be to insert forms into the machine and then add numerical or written information to them, so that the bank's records would be up to date. You would spend a great deal of time working at keeping customers' accounts accurate because every time a cheque was written, a withdrawal or deposit made or any other financial transaction took place, a record of this would have to be kept.

In a company, the bookkeeping machine operator uses a similar machine to keep financial records. As the bookkeeping machine operator here, you would be using the machine to make up invoices, bills, freight slips, cheques, and credit notes, or you might be working on the company's financial statement.

In places where there is a heavy workload, people sometimes use these machines evenings, as well as days, to keep financial records up to date. Some banks and large companies have computerized their bookkeeping operations. In places with computerized machines, the job remains much the same, except that the machine is more convenient and works much more quickly than the non-computerized version.

Billing Machine Operators

A billing machine looks and operates much like a bookkeeping machine. As its operator you would be using it to prepare customers' bills. This would involve typing a description of the goods or services the customer has received and then entering the price of the item on the bill. The advantage of this machine is that it can both type the bill and calculate the charges in much the same way as a bookkeeping machine.

NATURE OF WORK

Calculating Machine Operators

These machines take many forms. However, the ones used in offices are usually fairly large and can add, subtract, multiply, and divide. One of the more complicated types is a comptometer which has approximately one hundred keys.

Whatever the size of your machine, as a calculating machine operator you would compute or check calculations. These may be computations of inventory, payroll, financial statements, costing, statistical, or other numerical information.

Key-Punch Operators

During the past two decades, many large organizations have changed from manual record keeping to automatic punch card systems.

As a key-punch operator you would operate a machine with a similar keyboard to that of a typewriter. However, instead of inserting paper and typing words and figures, you would place a stack of cards in the machine and then, by depressing the keys, punch holes in the cards. These holes are each located in such a position that they can be identified by a computer as representing a specific item of information.

Sometimes it is necessary to transfer the same information to many cards. This is done automatically by attaching a previously punched card to the drum of the machine, which then records the same information on each card as it is processed.

Verifier Operators

Checking for accuracy of the information punched on the cards is done by a verifying machine, which is similar to the key punch and is operated in almost the same manner. It is not intended to punch holes but to "read" those already in the card. It does, however, punch around the edges of the card to indicate whether or not the information is correct. A punch made along the right edge indicates the information punched is correct. A punch along the top edge means an incorrect punch in the column below. Any cards found to be incorrect must be replaced with a new card on which the punch has been corrected. The job of key-punch operator and verifier operator is often combined.

THE OFFICE APPLIANCE GROUP

This group is concerned with operating machines that are designed to mechanically reproduce information. Included in the group are duplicating machine operators, embossing machine operators, and addressing machine operators.

Duplicating Machine Operators

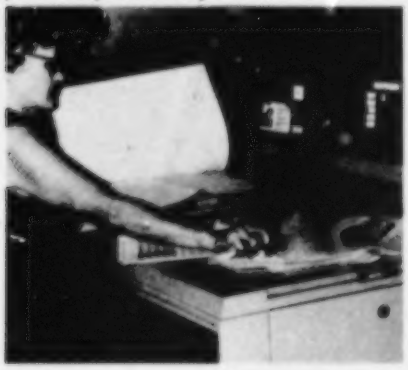
Duplicating machines – sometimes called convenience printers – reproduce pages of typed, handwritten, or graphic material. A variety of these machines is available and the kind used in your office will depend on the quality and quantity of copies needed. However, all machines are basically very simple to operate and, provided they are kept clean, give few service problems.

Depending on the machine used, you first place the stencil, paper mat, or metal printing plate around the cylinder. Then, having checked the supply of ink and other fluids, you place a batch of blank paper on the feed tray. After starting the machine, you would check the results and, if necessary, adjust the feed so that the printed material is in the centre of the page.

In many offices, where limited numbers of copies are required, photo-copying equipment is used. The duplicating machine operator is usually responsible for this machine.

Depending on the size of your office, delivering the copies and originals may be your duty. In large offices this function could occupy one clerk full-time. Similarly, recording the number of copies made and who ordered them, may be your responsibility.

Usually you will not be expected to know how to operate the machine before you start your job, although it would help. Frequently getting a job and getting ahead in it, or moving to other more responsible positions, is made much easier if you have completed your high school education. Most machines can be mastered very quickly – some in one day.



NATURE OF WORK

Addressing Machine Operators

Addressing machines print names, addresses and other information onto labels or envelopes. Most magazines use this sort of system to mail their editions to subscribers. Small offices also use these machines to send out mass mailings of advertising material.

Addressing machine operators feed embossed plates or stencils into the machine, along with envelopes or labels. They make sure that the machine is clearly printing the addresses on the labels or envelopes, replacing incorrect cards as necessary. Most addressing machines are equipped with mechanisms that enable the machine to automatically select plates which have been tagged according to a code. As an operator you may be responsible for tagging the plates. As well as these mechanical addressing machines, new computerized machines have been developed. These use electronic equipment to create address labels or print addresses directly onto envelopes.

Embossing Machine Operators

Embossing machines produce raised letters or numbers on metal or plastic cards that are often used in addressing machines. Identification-type cards – like credit cards or student cards – are also produced in this way.

Some of the older machines are very slow to operate. Each letter must be selected and then stamped into the card separately. Other machines have keyboards like typewriters and are operated by placing a card in the machine, then typing as if you were using a normal typewriter. The difference is that this machine operates more noisily and slowly. Computerized addressing machines are also in use. A typewriter keyboard is used to input the address information onto a computer-type memory which can be used to produce labels or stamp addresses directly onto envelopes. Where this type of equipment is available no embossing machine is necessary.

THE MATERIAL CONTROL GROUP

People in this group of occupations are involved in receiving, storing, issuing, shipping, ordering, and accounting for material being used or stored by their organizations. Although there are many specific occupational titles in this field, the duties involved in all of them are closely related to the occupations we will now be looking at – production clerks, shipping and receiving clerks, and stock clerks.

Production Clerks

With increased automation and complexity of products – consisting of a multitude of parts and materials – the words "control" and "co-ordination" have become very big on the factory or workshop floor.

As a production clerk your job would differ according to the type of organization for which you worked. However, whether you were employed by a manufacturing plant, repair shop, or even a T.V. or movie studio, your tasks would involve planning the work and materials flow.

To do this, you would study orders for goods or services, prepare work and production schedules to meet time limits, and make arrangements to ensure a steady flow of sufficient parts and materials to fabricating and assembly workers.

If you like to feel part of a production team, enjoy personal contacts, and have the ability to absorb technical detail, a start as a production clerk could be very rewarding.

Shipping and Receiving Clerks

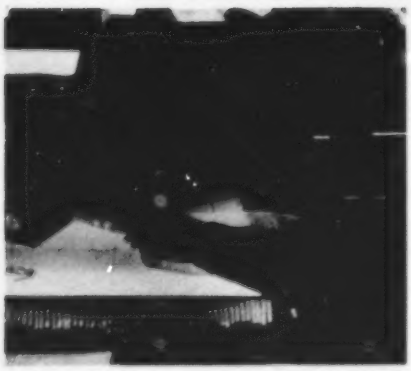
The basic function of a shipping and receiving clerk is, as the title implies, to ship and receive goods.

If you were in this occupation you would have to be very familiar with shipping procedures, routes, and costs, in order to determine the best way to ship specific articles. After deciding how to transport the material you would contact freight carriers by telephone, and make the necessary arrangements. You would have to check your orders to ensure that you were sending the right things, in the correct quantity. In preparing the goods for shipment you might have to assemble wooden or cardboard containers, or choose other containers in which to put the goods, and then put identifying information and shipping instructions on them. You would also prepare the bills (bills of lading) that would go with the goods to their destination.

For goods coming into your company or organization you would check that the correct goods have been sent. Recording all shortages, and rejecting damaged goods would also be your duty. After doing this you would send the incoming goods to the company stockroom or to the department that requires them.

An important part of the duties of a shipping and receiving clerk is keeping files that contain accurate records of all shipping transactions.

After you have experience and a thorough knowledge of the duties, you may supervise other people in packing and unpacking goods and loading and unloading goods onto, or from, trucks or railroad cars. You may also be involved in taking inventories (complete lists of goods stored) and perhaps in operating handtrucks, fork-lifts, elevators, or conveyor systems.



NATURE OF WORK

Stock Clerks

As a stock clerk you would compile records concerned with quantity, cost, and type of material received, stored and issued in your organization, and from these – by examining production, sales or other records, – estimate future needs for goods or materials (stocks). This will involve calculating the stocks held in one, or several departments, and then ordering the additional quantities needed for future use.

You would have other related duties as well. These would include checking that your organization has issued or received the proper type and amount of material, figuring out the rates at which your organization uses up various types of material, and making periodic checks to ensure that your records accurately reflect stock on hand.

Stock clerks are often responsible for the safe custody of material in stock. Duties related to this aspect of their job depend on the items handled. For example, if they keep inventory on perishable items like food or drugs then proper temperature and humidity of the storage area may have to be maintained. However, stock clerks in charge of construction materials would not normally have temperature or humidity as one of their responsibilities.

GENERAL OFFICE CLERKS

If you were one of the thousands of general clerks employed in practically every type of organization, your duties would probably be a combination of several tasks. These could include copying, calculating, compiling letters, and recording and filing information.

In large offices the work may be restricted to a few areas, but in a small business you might have to open and sort mail, write and send out letters and bills, receive and enter payments in an accounts book, take orders and calculate prices, and operate several basic office machines.

Big organizations often start their clerical workers as general clerks, and in this manner give new employees an opportunity to learn about the business and the work before being allocated to a more specific or specialized area. If you like variety you would probably prefer smaller establishments.

Office work generally offers good physical working conditions. Proper heating, lighting, and ventilation are enjoyed by most clerical people, but some business offices may be crowded.

The starting salary in specific clerical occupations will depend on your level of education and training more than anything else, and you will normally be paid every week, or every second week.

The work week for most clerical people is 37½ hours, and office hours are usually from about 8:30 or 9:00 a.m. to about 5:00 or 5:30 p.m., five days each week. The usual lunch period is one hour, and a 10- or 15-minute coffee break in the morning and afternoon is normal.

If the office must remain open on Saturdays, clerical people generally take turns on duty, and receive time off during the week in return. Accounting staff may have to work overtime as the end of an accounting period approaches. Others might have to complete daily balances in their accounts before leaving for the night, and this may also involve some extra time periodically.

Vacation periods often increase with length of service, but you should normally expect two to three weeks of holidays after your first year. You are also entitled to 10 statutory holidays each year.

Most large organizations provide pension plans – with the employer covering at least 50 per cent of the monthly contribution – as well as group life and hospitalization insurance.

A first-aid room, often with a nurse or attendant on duty, is frequently provided in large organizations, and employees may even receive treatment prescribed by their own doctor in these facilities. Clerical people normally get time off for sickness, without having to provide a medical certificate or losing pay, as long as such absences do not occur too often.

ADVANCEMENT

Possibilities for advancement vary greatly according to the specific occupation, and also the size and type of organization for which you work.

In small companies your work will usually not be limited to that covered by your occupational title – instead you will be expected to share a variety of additional duties with other employees. Telephone switchboard operators, for example, may also do the work of receptionists, typists, and filing clerks. Bookkeepers might also operate calculating machines, duplicating machines, billing machines and do some of the work of statistical clerks, and so on. This means that you may have the opportunity to learn other skills and to acquire a broad understanding of the entire business. Under these conditions, there may be promotion possibilities in several different directions.

In a large establishment, however, your work will usually be confined to a very specific segment of the business. In these organizations, for example, a calculating machine operator would probably do nothing but work with this one machine all day. Everyone becomes highly specialized, and exposure to other aspects of the business is limited. Under these conditions, promotion is normally along the route of supervisor, section head and then departmental manager – all within your area of specialty.

Whatever the size of the organization or avenues for progression, advancement is something to work and prepare for. This makes it important for you to consider what additional knowledge or skills you may need, and whether or not you could pick these up through full – or part-time courses. If you are sure of your career path, you may decide to pursue applicable courses in high school, business college, community college, CEGEP, or university before looking for a job. On the other hand, many people with minimum qualifications find jobs in occupations they expect they will enjoy, and familiarize themselves with the field. Then they take additional courses, either in the evening or by correspondence, which will enhance their prospects for advancement.

If you are in school, your guidance counsellor will be able to give you specific directions on what courses are available and where, and how these relate to the occupation you are considering. Once you are on the job, if you take the trouble to ask, your employer will often suggest the types of courses which will help you the most in your advancement. This will not only let your employer know that you are interested in developing your potential, but you will also be concentrating on the most relevant courses.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

The clerical group is attractive to many different types of people because of the great variety of jobs available. People who enjoy meeting and helping others, for example, might like to be receptionists or order clerks. On the other hand, people who prefer to work at specific tasks on their own might prefer a job like duplicating machine operator.

For all of the jobs in this chapter the power to concentrate with noise and distractions near by, and a good memory for detail are assets. Periods of heavy workload and emergencies can become hectic, so the ability to cope with stress is also valuable. Work in small establishments, where a few people share all the clerical duties, may require more initiative and versatility, than would be called for in larger, more specialized offices.

For work in this field limited physical activity is normal. However, finger dexterity and good co-ordination are very important, especially for those who plan to work in the secretarial or accounting machine groups.

For this type of work you must be able to understand instructions and be able to make decisions of a medium degree of difficulty. As clerical work involves processing written information you should also be able to work with words comfortably and to use them effectively.

PREPARATION AND TRAINING

For clerical occupations, education requirements depend to a very large extent on the employer. Some may specify high school graduation, while others may accept people with 1 or 2 years less. If you wish to follow a career in the clerical field, it is best to concentrate on the high school commercial programs with emphasis on subjects such as arithmetic, language, bookkeeping, typing, and shorthand. Community colleges, institutes of technology, *collèges d'enseignement général et professionnel*, and universities offer courses in accounting, business administration, secretarial science, personnel management, and mathematics. For people interested in improving their prospects in clerical occupations these courses would be beneficial. Operation of specialized equipment, such as bookkeeping and billing machines, or calculators is usually taught on the job or at training centres established by the equipment suppliers. These centres, like business colleges, generally charge tuition fees.

In 1974 the clerks covered in this chapter made up about 10 per cent of all people working. In 1980 it is expected that they will make up about 11 per cent of the total labour force. So, clerks are going to continue to be a very important part of the economy for some time yet.

It is expected that, unless there is a major change in the way the economy operates, there will be between 20 and 25 per cent more people working as clerks in 1980 than there are today. Comparing this with the average growth in the labour force, which is expected to be between 12 and 18 per cent from 1974 to 1980, you can see that the clerk's contribution to the economy is going to be relatively more important in the future.

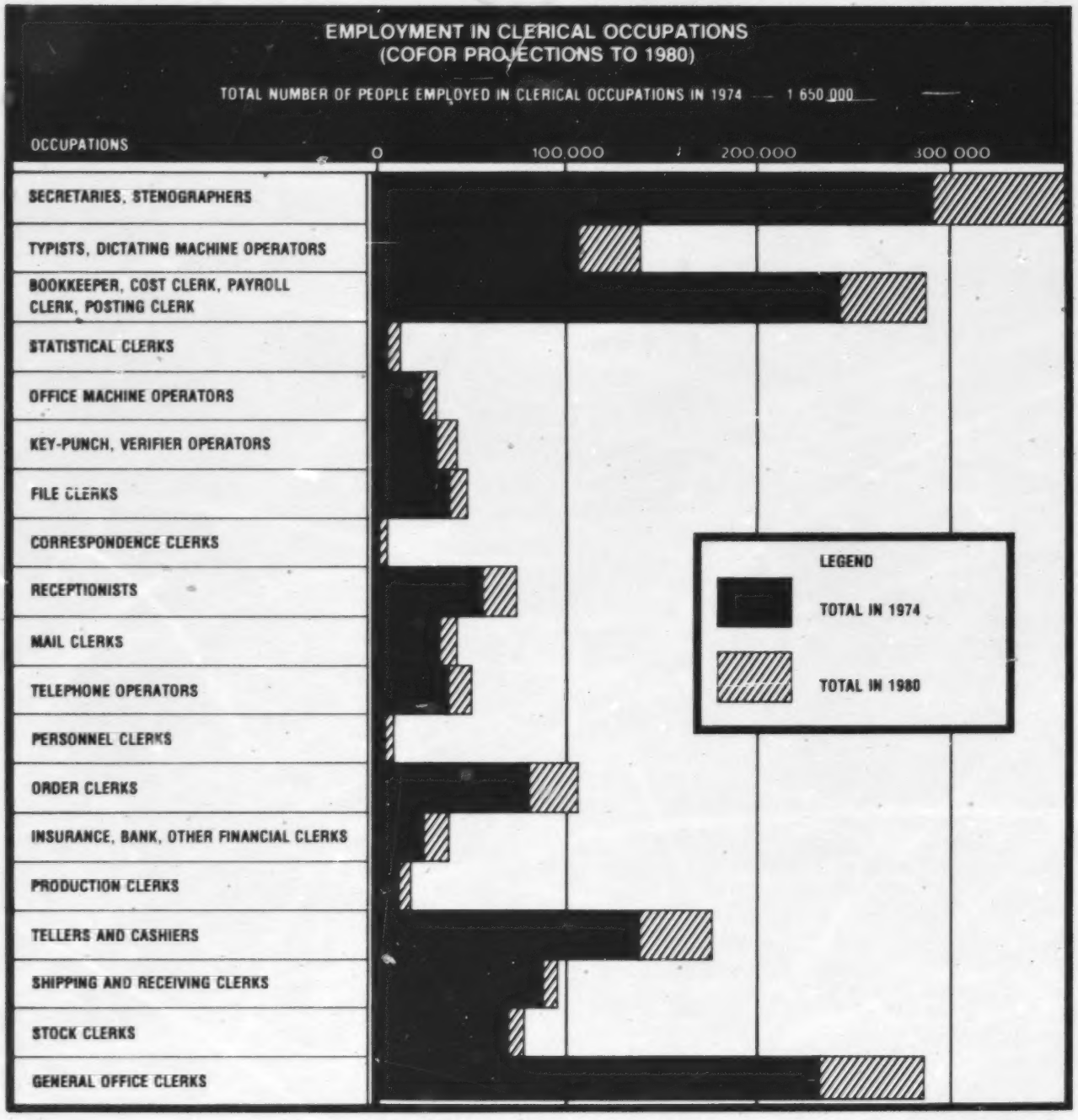
What does all of this mean to someone planning a career? Quite simply it means that while no one knows exactly how many jobs there will be, it is expected that there will be significantly more jobs in 1980 for people in these fields than there are today. Thus, there will be a need for people to enter clerical work either after they have finished school or from other fields of employment.

Now, how many people work in the various types of clerical occupations? The following graph shows how many people worked in clerical positions in 1974. It is projected that in 1980 there will be more of all these positions, but the proportion of clerical positions will stay the same or increase slightly.

In 1980, for example, it is expected that there will be about 368,000 secretaries working. In 1974 there were only 291,714. Thus between 1974 and 1980 approximately 76,000 new secretaries* will have to start working if all the positions are going to be filled. Similarly it is expected that about 6,000 new positions for office machine operators will open up. Now, remember this will be a gradual process over the six years between 1974 and 1980. However, it is fairly clear that there will be a continuing demand for all types of clerks. For information on specific clerical occupations examine the graph. You should be able to find the position of interest to you there.

*In addition there will have to be replacements for any secretaries leaving their positions between now and 1980.

FUTURE OUTLOOK



NOTE: THIS BOOKLET COVERS MAIN OCCUPATIONS IN THE CLERICAL FIELD. MANY MORE OCCUPATIONAL TITLES EXIST, HOWEVER, MOST OF THEM REPRESENT A COMBINATION OF DUTIES AND SKILLS COVERED IN THIS BOOKLET.

SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

A job search has several stages. Your first step will be to choose an area of work in which you are interested. Then you must find out who has available positions in your field. Finally, you will have to convince employers with jobs to offer that they should hire you.

Choosing an occupation is probably the most important and difficult step in finding a job. We hope that this booklet has assisted, but if you want more information Canada Manpower Centres have counsellors that may be able to help – so do most schools. You might also consider talking to your parents or friends, or anyone whose opinion you respect. This decision is probably one of the most vital you will make, so choose with care.

Once you have decided on the type of work you want, you will have to begin your search for available positions. The best known sources of this information are Canada Manpower Centres, newspaper want ads, and provincial agencies. However, you may be surprised to hear that more people find work by talking to their friends and relatives than by any other single job search method. An equally important method of finding out about job openings is to approach companies who employ people in your field, even when they have not advertised. If you are lucky, the employer may need someone with your qualifications, or the person you talk to may know of another firm looking for employees. To find out about available jobs you should use as many of these sources of information as possible.

Now, how do you convince a company that they should hire you? Once you have found out about a vacancy you may try to get an interview, or you may write a letter including a summary of your education and experience.

Here are a few ideas which might help you with an interview. First, and most important, know what you want to do and know what the company and job are about. This will help you to speak intelligently and show an interest in the job – two very important factors. Second, arrive a few minutes early, and when called to the interview room enter fairly quickly and as confidently as you can. Do not worry about being nervous – employers expect this. Answer questions directly and clearly and stay on the topic of discussion. Finally, dress for your interview as you would for a normal day's work in the job for which you are applying. If you are not sure how people dress, visit the office before the interview and check. So, know yourself, know the job, listen to the questions, and do not worry about being nervous.

You might prefer to write a letter and include a résumé (summary of your education and experience). If so, try to bring out why you feel that you can do the job. Arrange your résumé so that it is no longer than one page and have the most important points near the beginning or end. You should include any activities in which you have been involved that show you are a potentially valuable employee. Letters should follow the same general guidelines as a résumé. However, usually a letter is written in relation to a job or jobs you know or think may be available, while a résumé is a fact sheet outlining all of your abilities and accomplishments. Often a letter and résumé are sent together. In this situation, the letter should stress the abilities and accomplishments mentioned in your résumé, and you should relate these to the job you are seeking.

RELATED PUBLICATIONS

This booklet in the Careers-Canada series has been designed to give you some idea of the many opportunities in the world of clerical work. To take full advantage of these opportunities, it is necessary to plan your future over as long a period as possible. Other booklets are being prepared, and you may wish to read several of these in planning your career.

Each booklet combines a number of occupations with similar interests. Clerical occupations, for example, would appeal to people interested in classifying and recording information and getting ideas across to other people. You will find in this interest area, occupations that require anywhere from about Grade 10 to one or more years of post-secondary study. It is hoped that after reading some of the material, you will be better able to select certain options which may be open to you in school, or through various training programs.

Such long range planning, of course, is fine if you have the time – but if you have left school, or wish to change occupations, you may need exact information about a particular occupation in your province right now. For this reason, a second series has been prepared under the title of Careers-Provinces. This series consists of a number of leaflets – each covering a single occupation – giving precise details of preparation and training, licensing or certification requirements, and pay scales. Careers-Provinces leaflets are available at your local Canada Manpower Centre and have been made available for use in high schools and other educational institutions.

As well, there are two standard publications – The Canadian Classification and Dictionary of Occupations, Volumes 1 and 2 – which contain a classification and definition of over 6,700 occupations. These publications can be seen in Canada Manpower Centres, or can be ordered from Information Canada – catalogue number MP53-171/1 and MP53-171/2. The current price is $20 per copy.